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THE MINSTREL  
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# The Minstrel

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Redeemer University College's Poetry and Fiction Magazine



Volume 13, Spring 2003

# The Minstrel

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“The poet is not a man who asks me to look at *him*;  
he is a man who says ‘look at that’ and points.”

- C.S. Lewis

“A well-known writer got collared by a university  
student who asked, ‘Do you think I could be a  
writer?’ ‘Well,’ the writer said, ‘I don’t know...do  
you like sentences?’” - Annie Dillard

**Editor:** Judith Byl  
**Assistant Editor:** Amy Hilborn  
**Faculty Advisor:** Hugh Cook  
**Cover Photograph:** “Up” Danny Irvine

## **Mercy**

With arms outstretched towards the sky  
In wonder of your faithfulness  
Your name I'll ever glorify

You rescued me from death, and I  
Will ever more your great name bless  
With arms outstretched towards the sky

In pain and sin I used to cry  
Until you healed my brokenness  
Your name I'll ever glorify

Great mercy flows from you, Most High  
And I received with thankfulness  
With arms outstretched towards the sky

I can't resist the Spirit's sigh  
And falling on my knees, confess  
Your name I'll ever glorify

Approaching is the day that I  
Will gaze upon your holiness  
With arms outstretched towards the sky  
Your name I'll ever glorify

*Karen Breimer*

## **Hunting Salamanders in October**

I didn't think we'd find you with the chill wind,  
the overcast sky dragging shadows across the lake  
making the world look more than real.

We'd walked for hours with runny noses,  
our hands pulled up inside our coats,  
using our sleeves as makeshift kleenex.

We'd jumped puddles, climbed logs, fell in puddles,  
skipped stones, turned logs, lay on stone and daydreamed  
and felt our ears and toes grow numb.

But then, there you were, a spindle of fire  
with four legs and a tail, black spots  
on a solar body, a spattered array of eclipses.

Your red body spoke of warmth and held defiance  
to the shortening days as your sluggish feet and tail  
moved, and were still, and then moved.

Our hands came out of our sleeves and reached  
for you, and I'm sorry if we stung you with our frozen  
fingers, but we were sure that somehow you had found us.

*Lindsay MacMillan*

### **Desert Rain**

Umbrella blooms  
sprout  
    spontaneous  
in street  
Children stomp  
    in puddles  
splashing up  
    life  
between towers  
that glisten  
    and sparkle,  
wet.

harsh baptism  
scours streets  
streaming sewers

Parched city  
    remembers  
buried roots  
    it tried  
to forget.

*Walter Miedema*



## Heart in Hand

Joyce Laurette Alblas

It's Saturday afternoon. He's at the piano, as he usually is after his half day; the keys are jangling. He always plays the same songs, but they never sound the same twice. They are pieces he knew as a child: quite advanced, really, for someone who is self-taught. There's Bach, Sousa, Brahms, and other composers that I don't recognize. Songs with names like *Glow-worm*, *Blue Danube*, *Stars and Stripes Forever*, *Edelweiss*, *Musette*. There's no music on the piano; it's all coming from his heart. His fingers are lovely, long and lean with just the right shape tapering out to the tip. His hands jump from chord to chord; the runs he creates cover all ebony and ivory keys from the top octave to the bottom. Everything is vibrating.

But now he's getting up; unusual, since he normally plays for at least an hour. He's going toward the front door as if drawn by some intuition, some inner voice that only he has heard in the midst of the notes he has been playing. He's going out onto the porch and standing by the railing—looking toward the park across the street. I hear yelling. "Get away from there." I am startled to hear the bellows coming from a man who is mostly composed; something must be wrong.

He comes back into the house and heads toward his bag, the black leather one with "A.K." monogrammed on the top flap. He opens it and reaches in between the metal instruments and jars of creams and ointments. I hear the scalpels and clippers jingle up against one another as he searches for what he needs. His sure hand comes out of the bag; he has the tape, tongue depressors, and scissors that he has come for.

I watch as he steps out the front door again. This time he continues down the stairs, across the road, and over to the park. He walks until he reaches the oak saplings that have been planted this summer. They stand about five feet tall, looking like frail children up against the other giant trees beside them. There are three of them.

He stands looking at each tree in turn. One by one he goes to them and lifts the fallen branches, torn to the quick by crude hands. As if performing surgery, he aligns the branch, places the splint, applies the tape, and stands back to assess his work. He goes from tree to tree, from branch to branch, with a single purpose. When he is done, he stops to pick up a few fallen leaves and then he heads back to the house. There is no joy in his step.

He comes to the front door, and I hear him walk toward his bag: such a light step for someone so tall. He carefully places the contents of his hand into the bag and closes it; the clasp clicks softly.

He settles himself on the piano bench once again and fingers the keys as though they are silk, hands running across them with the smoothness of glass. He starts into another piece. I think it is *Lullaby*—no, it's another song—one that I have struggled with in my lessons—*The Little Shepherd*. And I wonder, who is this one who tends to broken limbs between the bars of Bach?

i

you are  
the teething moment when a smile breaks  
the only mirror I trust or need  
warm water releasing skin  
the world in four walls and four eyes

*Brett Alan Dewing*

**To my Grandfather**

The moon is up, scrubbed white and clean  
of summer's muggy haze, hanging  
in winter's crisp, cold atmosphere.

It looks into my window  
like a baleful, lidless eye,  
blinded by the cataracts  
of endless, weightless deserts  
suspended in space and infinity  
yet bound to this earth by the gravity  
that pulsates and pulls from the  
throbbing ventricular centre.

You are in eternity, scrubbed white and clean  
of this world, blind of me, suspended  
in heaven's crisp, cold atmosphere.

*Samuel Martin*

## **Kimchi**

Brown tile floor  
white brick walls  
fading sunlight beams  
through stained-glass windows  
barred by metal mesh

disposable chopsticks click  
amidst continual bubbling laughter  
and babbling and shrieks of delight

chopsticks plunge  
into large, smooth white bowl  
lifting leafy crunchy corrugated paleness  
blotched with red hot pepper  
chopped green onion  
tiny pickled shrimp

slender wood enters mouth  
disposing of its burden  
stinging lips  
burning cheeks  
paralyzed tastebuds

sip of brownish-yellow tea  
in styrofoam cup  
and hot succumbs to warmth

chopsticks snatch more spicy cabbage  
and enter mouth again

happy chatter  
warmth lingers

*Sarah Glenney*

## **Barren**

A melon  
like an old balloon,  
once taut,  
now limp  
and shrivelled:  
I am an onion skin.  
Inside me lies  
fall's flower,  
frost-blasted in the bud.  
Of what use is the echo  
of an empty cistern?  
I wait for the moving of the water, for  
the wild rush of movement deep  
within; for the fat smoothness  
of ripe fruit, heavy with moisture  
and longing to burst the burdened skin  
of its confinement and howl aloud life  
for all to hear.

*Tanya Byl*

## **My Eyes**

I have turned into a woman with weigh scales for eyes.  
I can measure my worth from a mile away.

I can see each crease and crevice with clarity  
and I can watch each bulge and broken step  
and Know what needs to be corrected  
because I have weigh scales for eyes.

They are split down the middle with a cat pupil  
and the kilogram marks are in my muddled, mediocre iris

My eyes are inside out and upside down  
they see me from far away and right close up  
to someone else.

I am a bag of apples balancing in a metal bin at the  
grocery store.

*Lindsay J. Adams*

## True?

If I must wish for you  
I know that wish  
will not come true

*Walter Miedema*

## First Job

When I was fifteen

I worked at the variety store beside McDonald's  
and the milk cooler, that chilled rancid vacuum,  
was my refuge between the would-be thugs  
and under-aged liars.

I had to pull out the used filters and grounds,  
miniature dirty diapers heavy with moisture,  
and carry them, dripping,  
across the freckled floor to the trash.

*Du Maurier Extra Lights, please.*  
The little glossed boxes hung in legions  
above the register: so many colourful venoms  
to choose from.

My bean-green polyester smock  
had two buttons but four holes,  
my store was a mushroom-coloured  
air-tight cabinet.

Every night before closing  
I would stock the dusty chocolate bars  
and drown the oily grey mop in its soupy,  
lukewarm bath.

And outside the windows, the crackling June bugs  
would hurl themselves at the bright flinching bulbs.  
They and the ropish spider webs were all I could see,  
etched in two-dimensional dirty white  
against giant, depthless black panes.

*Hayley Asnong*

### **Broken Microwave**

My food is cold.  
The gravy has seeped  
into the peas.

If it were warm,  
the world would be  
so much better.

*Bonnie Sutherland*

### **The Storm**

Doors open  
Hallway fills

Waves of bodies rush and recede  
Rush and recede

A beacon  
Two walls of grey boxes

A hurricane of glances  
Clear sky or cloudy

Plastic windshields for observation  
Each with distinguishing grey numbers

Keys lightning bolt  
Thunderous turning

Waves of bodies rush and recede  
Rush and recede

Hallway empties  
Doors close

*Kathleen Seagram*

## **Humpty Dumpty**

Okay, it's time for once upon a time...  
(that's how it starts, as everyone should know)  
...far, far away, where people speak in rhyme,  
an egg fell off the wall. His fall seemed slow  
to those who stood in shock to watch him crack  
and puddle gold the pavement. Maybe there  
were some who knew First-Aid, but Jill and Jack  
who'd fallen first were in their expert care.  
All stayed far back until the army came  
with pressure hoses meant for such a mess.  
It was a shame, but none would dare to blame  
the king's own men for acting under stress.  
Though Salmonella's rare, one must agree  
they were protecting the community.

*Tina Koopmans*

## **1:04 on the 401**

1:04 on the 401  
pushing deskspot lamplights  
by our blending fenders  
to read the broken line  
with eyepeeling lids  
slicing our vision  
into scratching grains  
of sand and light  
and the heavy swirl  
of half-thoughts  
in this circumstantial caravan

*Brett Alan Dewing*



## **under the surface**

we are all separate here  
avoiding avoidant eyes

our numbers shifting with every stop  
though no one dares to count

our breath is more visible than our souls  
buried with bodies below

and the expectant doors are always waiting  
as we wait to accept their offer

but I am happy here in this world of strangers

we have no knowledge of moving on  
if not to better things, to the next station

and the passing lights of consecutive tunnels  
are something like guides or green lights

so every morning we gather here

from tenements, brownstones, and penthouse suites  
from Scarborough, York, and Etobicoke

and each agrees for the time it takes  
to share this dirty car

and hurtling through the underworld  
we start the day with each other

*Brett Alan Dewing*

## **Fullness**

In a field of flowers  
delight swells up my soul  
bee sting swells up my knee.

*Judith Byl*

## The Dollar Store

*Corrine Jager*

There was always something bizarre to look at here; he liked places like this. The shelves were full of all kinds of oddities. He had just passed by three different kinds of spatulas, two racks of plastic jewellery and an assortment of hand-shaped backscratchers that had bent thumbs. He particularly liked the plastic elephants he was standing in front of now. Large and somewhat misshapen, they stood proudly with their trunks raised and their cheap paint already peeling. What would possibly possess someone to purchase this? he thought. Granted, it was only a dollar, as everything here was, but on what kind of occasion does one decide that a cheap plastic elephant is necessary? He kept walking and turned the corner. Aisle five was household items, somewhat practical but of questionable quality: thin oven-mitts, plastic flowers with unravelling petals, and cookware that is guaranteed to burn. He heard voices coming up beside him. He liked the people that came to shop at dollar stores. They, too, were always fun to look at; they were people from all different areas of life looking for cheap, random items.

"Well Margery, I just don't think I can make it to bridge this Thursday; the girls will have to do without me." He knew this voice, but it was out of context so it took him a moment to place it. It was his mother-in-law. He panicked. There was no reason to panic, but she had that effect on him. He darted back into aisle six, beside the elephants, and collected himself. He waited for them to reach aisle five, checked his appearance in a gaudy mirror across the room and rounded the corner, ready for whatever came.

"George! What are you doing here? Margery, this is my son-in-law George." He smiled, shook the hand that was offered, and shuffled his feet. "George works at the hospital." She always said that. She preferred to leave his actual profession vague so that people could assume he was a doctor. He hated that. He had never wanted to be a doctor; he didn't like school enough, but he liked to help people, so nursing seemed right. Being a male nurse was more and more common these days, but the stigma was still there.

"Just out browsing before my shift," he said, looking past the ladies and feeling silly for being in a dollar store with no distinct purpose. "I'm actually looking for a..." He paused. He was trying to think of something respectable he could be looking for, but what? "...An elephant." was all he could come up with. She looked at him with pity and said, "Well, good luck; we're on our way," and marched out. She was nice enough, but he resented her brazen confidence and the fact that he knew he didn't quite measure up to her standards. His shift started in ten minutes, and he hated being late. He walked back to aisle six and picked up the elephant. It stared at him, proud though peeling, and he brought it to the cash register where he paid for it with the torn five-dollar bill he had in his pocket.

**Cliff Jumping (A Sestina)** *Lindsay MacMillan*

We've hiked for hours to reach this eyrie cliff,  
but now at the top all I feel is paralysing fear  
as I lean over the edge, looking at the drop,  
the height from which my friends all plan to fall;  
the pool below, some feet from where waves break  
on rocks. Take care; don't jump too far, you'll hit.

It's then I realize the height, and I am hit  
by wonder that I'm standing on this cliff  
from which a fall could cause my bones to break,  
and ponder that I did not reel with fear  
when I peered over this cliff last Fall,  
but then, too cold, I did not think to drop.

I toss a stone and see it quickly drop  
and hold my breath and wait for it to hit  
the pool. Too long I watch the poor stone fall,  
so long a journey from the towering cliff,  
and try to judge how long I'd take. I fear  
I threw my stone too far, and saw it break.

I feel my resolution start to break.  
My poor stone's fate has made my stomach drop.  
I do not understand how with no fear  
my friend then runs and leaps. He will not hit  
the rocks below, he knows this Georgian cliff,  
and tucks his arms in for a perfect fall.

Then one by one I watch as my friends fall  
and I am last, which leaves me with a break  
to breathe, remember it's mind over cliff,  
and close my eyes to visualize the drop.  
If I tuck in my arms before I hit,  
not jump too far, I have nothing to fear.

This is my moment to conquer my fear  
Or else when I return again in Fall  
I'll know if I had tried, I could have hit  
that jump, and wonder why I didn't break  
away from my self-doubt, which I should drop  
in case I face in life another kind of cliff.

I still feel fear, but out of will I break  
into a run. The fall's a flash, I drop  
and hit. The pool is cold beneath the cliff.

## **The Sacrament of Penance**

Unchanging God who changes me  
I am stuck and distracted in man  
blind my eyes  
and bore my mind to silence

God in my Heart  
I am too much in life  
grab my shoulder  
and smile with serious eyes

teach me to do faith and be peace  
and always to be alive  
and never forgive me too much  
without a temperance of this pride

*Brett Alan Dewing*

## **Consecration**

*Judith Byl*

I sit in the front pew, which I hated as a kid, and I cradle Isaiah against my cotton shirt, against the softness of my still slightly-swollen abdomen (I want him to be held, and shoved the baby carrier beneath the pew). My ringless fingers softly stroke his arm and shield his eyes from the bright lighting, which beams down on his white skin. He wears the same gown I did, when I was a baby. The fabric is a little yellowed, now. It is time to stand.

Peter lifts Isaiah from Becca's arms, which hold her baby even when he sleeps, and we stand together before neighbours, bazaar committee members, and elders, on the stage, by the font. Becca hovers behind Peter, who wore a suit and a tie today, without being asked. The children rustle to the front, wearing tidy shirts, floral-print dresses, and hand-me-down shoes. Isaiah flinches from the noise but does not cry, like a doll, my daughter's plaything. My knees are weak; I steady myself on the communion table, my fingers propping me up on the honey-grained wood. Pastor George explains that baptism makes you clean. He holds up a jug of Tide detergent, with bleach.

Pastor George extends a microphone to me, my hands being full of my daughter's child, my grandson. A prayer for the children: I've been thinking this one out since last Sunday, when George suggested I participate in this way, and that I hold Isaiah. I begin. Dear Lord Jesus, thank you that you are near to us and that you love us. Thank you for making us clean, like Tide makes our clothes clean (this may have been a mistake). Bless all these children with your care, especially Isaiah as he gets baptized this morning. Thank you that you became a baby, like Isaiah, for us (this is true, but will be questioned over coffee). Amen.

## Worship Debate

*A Satire in the Tradition of Dryden in which Two Views  
are Expounded Upon and a Satisfactory Conclusion is Writ*

1. All throughout history there has been great debate  
O'er matters of significance, importance, and weight.  
Was Jesus Christ saviour, God, or just man?  
Should we spend church funds on a mere ceiling fan?  
Ought thrice God in union good Christians to name truth?  
Is raising thy hands in the minster uncouth?  
Down through the ages, discussions ensued;  
Only by Spirit could truth be imbued.  
After much struggle 'mongst family in Christ,  
A creed was established, concessions the price.  
In God the Father we all do believe;  
The importance of his Son and Spirit we perceive.  
Apostles, now dust, sigh "Amen" in their graves;  
For future believers, true doctrine this saves.  
All issues are settled, save one of import:  
This last stands its ground as an old Roman fort.  
The road from such fort rends the forest asunder,  
As rage o'er church instruments, unity doth plunder.  
For some, passion, some reason! Now which brings forth life?  
Discussions of worship and praise cause this strife.

2. My arms guard my sides and my feet firmly planted:  
The church is no brothel in which to run rampant.  
So holy! Let all in His temple keep silent.  
The realm of my passions does bode time vain spent.  
When any bright morning dares gild the sky  
My best heart's resounding and awe-full cry,  
"O God, please come, save my sinful soul!  
And thence to curs'd liberals your punishment dole!"  
"I abhor this trite song," is thy son's heritage.  
Whate'er it doth cost, to Truth be thy pledge.  
"Just give me a psalter, be sure it is gray;  
The long prayer may go, but the organ must stay!"  
That great faithful instrument, ornately displayed,  
Upholds every note, its lore ne'er shall fade.  
Reacting 'gainst reason, the youth are now gone;  
Still, among the faithful, tradition lives on.

3. Like the trees of the field, my arms loose express  
Confinement means naught; free worship and address  
Will hotly breathe life on these bones dry and brittle.  
The past is not present and therefore not pointful.

The stodgy, by freedom and emotion, outlawed;  
Who would live to worship a canonized God?  
That old form doth limit my soul and its width;  
I'd rather sing "Yes, Lord" ten times to the fifth.  
Make sermons more lively and strive to retain  
My thoughts, prone to wander. Thou must entertain!  
Throughout, the music and prayers flow smooth  
My unease and tension and headache remove.  
The drum beats a rhythm that reaches my core,  
Releasing spontaneity, my faith to explore.  
The old, so inflexible, drive life away;  
As forward we course, in the past they will stay.

4. Blurred are the lines 'tween the young and the old,  
Yet for this verse's purpose, I have left that untold.  
Man, in his folly, will grasp at extremes,  
And human connections thence burst at the seams.  
Eyes blinded to virtues each other possess,  
Still each contains prudence, insight, and sageness.  
Wise ones, take notice, this warning do heed:  
Without due restraint, oft evil we feed.  
If in our fervour, Christ we divide,  
For naught did he live and for naught still he died.

*Erin Goheen*

### **The Lady of Cedar Shake House**

I saw you through beveled glass windows and cut-lace curtains.  
I smelled bread baking and heard children laughing  
while playing with crayons and cradles and lippy-limbed dolls.  
You had long flowing hair and soft flowing gown  
embroidered with flowers and fancy french knots.  
I smelled cider mulling and heard popcorn popping,  
there were story books and building blocks and blankets on the floor.

And then you appeared  
in a suit coloured purple of starch-stiffened fabric stretched tight to your skin.  
And that fair skin, your smooth almond skin while hid under the gown,  
was deep-lined and leathered.  
Held in your hand was a cup made of paper and a bag of bought bagels,  
green onion bought bagels.  
Your hair was close-cropped in spikes of yolk yellow  
and your children clutched battery-fed babies tight in their hands.

*Joyce Laurette Alblas*

## **Her Bedroom**

Porcelain dolls with pretty faces  
lined my shelves and watched me sleep.  
Gentle bears with sorry eyes  
warmed my arms beneath the sheets.

Now it seems the porcelain dolls,  
painted faces without regret,  
share neglect with threadbare teddies;  
Empty eyes watch me undress.

*Robyn Konyndyk*

## **The Truth About Some Girls**

*Amy Hilborn*

My sister Shaye always told me that older girls were trouble. I never believed her until I met Juliana. I was fifteen the summer I met her. She was a tennis instructor for the summer camp held up at Hidden Lakes Golf and Country Club; I worked there too that summer. But I was just a caddy for the golf course and sometimes, if I was lucky, my boss, Mr. McHale, would let me answer the phone in the pro shop. Muskoka was a great place to live. It was my first year working at the country club, and I remember being so excited that I had been hired. Shaye, being older than me, had been working there for three years already as a waitress, and she had got me the job.

That summer up at our house in Bracebridge, I had begun shaving for the first time. Shaye would laugh at me in the mornings before work. She said it was only peach fuzz, but I was determined it was something, something important enough to borrow Dad's razor every morning. Shaving was a touchy subject for me; actually, everything that summer was. I was a hurricane of hormones. We often fought for the bathroom, Shaye because she liked long showers and me because I wanted to have just the right image. My red hair was curly, out of control, and often ran into my eyes. Fortunately, my voice had calmed down, but between the freckles and pimples that overpopulated my face, I was a walking case of chicken pox, never healed.

My parents were really good about letting us take the old station wagon into work, and Mom still packed our lunches. It was easier that way, she said. Secretly, I knew she still liked to baby us. I didn't mind, as long as she didn't do it in public.

The country club was really ritzy, and everyone had money. My tips on the golf course were usually good, although there were some old buggers who never paid. That always infuriated me, because they threw money at the waitresses as easily as they lost their Rolexes on the course. But I, of course, like a good boy, would give them their watches back. Sometimes I felt like shattering them just as easily as they shattered people's reputations. I knew they didn't think much of people who were poor; I knew they thought very little of me. I was just their footstool, the son of a poor landscaper in Huntsville, while these men lived in Rosedale, one of the richest areas in Toronto. Then they would cottage every summer on Lake Rosseau and dine at Windermere House every Sunday for brunch. These men had a life; I, apparently, didn't.

I remember the day I finally saw Juliana. She was running across the tennis court in a short, white tennis skirt. Her long legs were bronzed and damp from the summer sun. I had been instructed by Mr. McHale to guard the pro shop while he went to find Mike, who was supposed to be managing the cash register. I felt very important that day as I sat in the pro shop, which faced the tennis courts. I remember sneaking peeks out the



window at Juliana. She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. I had heard a lot about her already from the older guys who worked on the golf course. Most of the stuff they said about her was rude, and I promised myself I would never repeat it. When I saw her, I knew they weren't lying about her body; she was beautiful, tanned. I began to feel cursed, as though an inevitable spell had been cast on me. I thought it was love at first sight. Except Juliana didn't know I existed.

Juliana was tall, with short, blond hair; she was wearing a white visor, so I couldn't see her eyes, but I imagined that they were as beautiful as the rest of her. According to my sister, Juliana was a rich bitch who broke all the rules. Shaye said she had a bad reputation; that she was easy and heavily into drugs. Juliana's daddy's chequebook fixed all her problems. I could never believe that, now that I had seen her. Juliana was too perfect, like a goddess or a model from one of those teen magazines that the girls from my high school browsed through during the school year. I would never admit I had sometimes stolen peeks in them at Becker's.

Juliana was heading towards the pro-shop. I remember panicking as I tried to straighten my hair. I wet it down with my fingers. I hated my hair. While I was frantically tucking in my shirt, Juliana walked in. She headed straight for the bottles of Evian water stored in the fridge near the back of the oak counter. She pulled one out and began to drink. I watched her lips as she drank the water down, seeming to savour each swallow. She was really thirsty; I remember wondering what it would be like if I were that water bottle. I blushed at the thought and began organizing the golf shirts that were already stacked neatly. I had to do something with my clammy hands. I felt guilty for staring. Fortunately, she hadn't noticed me as she leaned back against the wall and continued to drink her water. I wondered who she had been playing tennis with. Her body seemed to glow with sweat. I felt intoxicated by her presence.

I knew that if she ever did notice me, she would wish that she hadn't. I was that ugly duckling that you tried to forget and knew you couldn't. I would never be a swan. In fact, I didn't know if I wanted to be. But I did know I wanted Juliana to like me. Perhaps that fairytale I could live with.

When she did notice me, our eyes met for seconds, and then the most horrible thing happened. She laughed. I felt crushed and continued to pat down the golf shirts with my shaking hands.

"Hey, Red," she said, tossing her water bottle into the garbage can next to the door. "Can you tell Mike I took one?"

I nodded, not wanting to meet her eyes but knowing that it was hopeless; I was entranced by her voice, even if it was mocking. She smirked; I swallowed. Our eyes met again, and she raised a curious brow.

"What's your name?"

I stopped; my heart, everything in me, seemed to stand still. I wondered if I had heard right. She was talking to me. I told my voice to remain calm, but it refused to be obedient; I squeaked.

"Tom." After I had said it, I wanted to take it back.

"Tommy? That's cute."

"Tom," I mumbled. I knew then she would never think of me as a man.

"How long have you been working here?" she asked, picking up her tennis racket from where she had left it against the door. I tried to come up with a calm and cool way of saying something, but nothing was coming to me. I stared at her, wordless, as though I had swallowed the alphabet with my morning breakfast and couldn't offer even one syllable of acknowledgment.

"Can you talk, Tommy?" she laughed again. I flinched and prayed that I wouldn't do anything else embarrassing, like burp or fart. That would be the end of me. I mustered enough courage to cough out that I had been working here since June.

"Oh, yeah, you're Shaye Donahue's little brother. Cool, do you like it here, Tommy?"

I wondered why she was continuing to talk to me. I felt like this was a dream. She wasn't laughing at me now, but her eyes didn't seem that interested, either. She actually appeared bored as she stood against the counter looking at me. It was then that I realized that she was taller than me. I wanted to hide, but instead, I

hunched over the golf shirts, hoping that she wouldn't notice our height difference.

"Sure. The tips are usually good." There: I had said one meaningful sentence. She looked down at her long fingernails. I stared at her breasts. They were huge. Embarrassed, I hoped she hadn't noticed or read my thoughts.

"I bet. Does my dad tip you well? Mr. Aird? Do you know him?" Mr. Aird, that name sounded familiar. Oh, yes, Mr. Aird, I remembered him. Distaste crept into my mouth. How could I not remember him? The man was a stingy bastard. But I didn't let on to Juliana how much I despised him. Mr. Aird was the worst of the buggers who treated me as though I was the shit beneath his foot just because he had money and I didn't. I was the walking robot who carried his clubs, was forbidden to speak, yet was forced to help clean up his vomit when he was hammered by the 14th hole. They all liked to drink. Drink and golf. What a nice way to spend your life. It disgusted me. I swore that if I ever got a lot of money some day, I would never become like them. I couldn't believe Mr. Aird was Juliana's father; I hated the thought and wished that Juliana wasn't soiled by that connection. I was surprised that Shaye hadn't told me about Mr. Aird. But, then again, I was very careful not to ask her questions about Juliana. I knew Juliana had to be different, she couldn't be like her father.

"Yes, I know him. He tips well," I lied. She shrugged. "I bet." She looked aimlessly down at her watch and sighed.

"I'm so bored. I have today off." She looked at me, as if I could help her out of her boredom. I didn't know what to do. A strange look filled her eyes. Yes, they were blue. God, she was so beautiful. I wanted to touch her. I wondered what her skin would feel like. As if reading my eyes, she said mockingly, "You like me, don't you?"

Humiliated, I had nothing to say. I knew my cheeks were red. I felt like a spotted, red fireball burning up in front of her. I only prayed I would be ashes at her feet before I was forced to answer.

"It's okay. Most guys do. You know, you're too young for me." She pointed out the obvious. I felt feverish, delirious. I hoped Mike would return soon so that I could run away from here. I felt so stupid. "You want to kiss me, right?" she snickered, tossing her blond hair out of her eyes. She stepped closer. "I know that's what you're thinking."

I remembered hoping I wouldn't wet my pants. Everything in my body felt out of whack. Fighting for control, I clasped my sweaty hands together and prayed that she would leave. Her presence was too close, too frightening. What did she really want from me? My dignity? I knew I had lost that the moment she had walked in.

"Tommy, have you ever smoked up? Tried weed?" Her questions were becoming more and more unsettling. Still, no words found themselves on my tongue. In fact, I didn't know if I had a tongue anymore, and if it was still there it had become numbed like every other part of my body. I knew I was breathing weird, but there was nothing I could do about it. I felt as though I were a stallion trapped in a snail's shell. There was no way out for me but to crawl, and even that was impossible.

"Pot?" I croaked, unsure of where she was going with this question. Shaye had mentioned Juliana was into drugs; I had ignored that fact up until now.

"Yeah, c'mon out back with me.... I have some in my car." She nodded towards the tennis courts. "I hate smoking up all by myself. It's so depressing. Much more fun with company; I bet you'll like it." She grabbed my shoulder and tugged me out the door.

Hypnotized, I followed her over the gravel parking lot and past the tennis courts until we reached a silver Lexus. I recognized it as one of Mr. Aird's many luxurious cars. I cringed at the sight of it, remembering him swearing at me when I had dropped one of his clubs and it had scraped against one of his wheel rims. The scratch was still there.

Juliana unlocked the doors with a remote control that beeped as she opened the back door. I couldn't

believe she had drugs stashed away in the back of her father's car. I knew I should leave; Mr. McHale was probably back with Mike and would have my head if I wasn't there. Besides, drugs weren't really my thing, and I didn't want Juliana to know that I was completely inexperienced. I needed to get back to the pro shop. I didn't want to lose my job for abandoning it or, worse, get caught smoking up with the daughter of one of the wealthiest clients at the club. But then, with her hand on my shoulder, guiding me, coaxing me to stay, it was impossible to think rationally. I forgot about everything. All I could think about was Juliana.

She held a zip-lock bag of mossy weed in her left hand. I swallowed as she sat down on a large rock behind us. Her other hand waved the buzzing mosquitoes out of her hair.

"Damn it, I hate bugs," she said while opening the bag, her legs parted. I could see up her tennis skirt to her white underwear, or was it shorts that she wore. I bit my bottom lip and looked away.

"You're staring again," she laughed, "Boys are always the same. You see a pretty girl and immediately think sex." I blushed at the truth of her words. She was so blunt; I didn't know what to expect from her. I felt stupid and awkward as I stood near her, not sure of which leg I felt most comfortable on. Neither. Nothing felt comfortable about this moment, and the marijuana that was now beginning to smolder in the air hurt my nostrils and made my eyes water.

"Are you going to try some?"

"Ahh, well..." I hesitated; she snickered.

"Chicken?" I shook my head and reached for the bag. I'd show her that I was—

"Tom?"

"God, Tom?" It was Shaye's voice. Startled, I dropped the bag of weed and it fell to the ground.

"Tom, what are you doing?" Shaye stood behind me now; I hadn't heard her footsteps, but then again I seemed to be deaf to everything that day, especially reason. I didn't have to turn around to know what Shaye's expression was going to be. I had let her down, I had let myself down.

"Tom Donahue!"

Another voice broke the silence, a deep one this time. I froze. Juliana grabbed the weed, trying to conceal it behind her back.

"Young man, I need to talk to you!"

I knew the voice well; it was Mr. McHale, and I knew I had just lost my first job. There was nothing I could do about it. Regretfully, I watched Juliana as she scurried off into the woods like Goldilocks with her bag of weed in tote, and I was left to face the wrath of Mr. Bear. This was not the fairytale I could live with.

"Sir..." I started. But there was nothing I could say to undo what I had just done. I had left the store unattended and run off into the woods with an older girl to get high. It looked terrible, and I couldn't erase it. Shaye looked shocked and angry. I knew she was going to give me a lecture I would never forget once we left. I knew that I deserved it.

Mr. McHale looked disappointed, his drooping eyes sad as he told me I needed to leave. I knew then that despite his gruffness, he had actually been quite fond of me. He offered no explanation for relieving me of my position; I didn't need one, and he didn't give one. We both knew it was over. To this day, this is a chapter in my life I'd like to forget, but can't; it is the one I warn my sons with. Yes, first crushes are never easy. But this one left a blister that has never quite healed. Of course, Juliana never lost her job. I hear she still teaches tennis there to this day and still lives off her father's Visa card. I never saw her again. I didn't want to. I felt betrayed. I knew she had never liked me, but for a second I had hoped she had. She wasn't different. Shaye had been right. She was a rich bitch, just like her bastard father. But I did learn a lesson that summer. I learned that having red hair and pimples was better than sporting a plastic Barbie body. And that some people would always run away from their problems or hide behind their money to get by. I had paid for the consequences of my actions that summer, and I never again got fired from a job. Yes, older girls are trouble, but not all of them. My wife, Tasha, is six years older than I am and, to her, I am a swan. This is the fairytale I want to live in.

